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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 002526

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SUBJECT: POST-ELECTION LANDSCAPE: FRAUD ALLEGATIONS  
SHARPENING, IEC HOLDING TO ITS LINE

Classified By: PolCouns Annie Pforzheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: President Karzai's supporters continue to sound confident, although some admit their leader is "weak" and will only get weaker, and more beholden to his supporters, if the election goes to a second round. Abdullah, meanwhile, is claiming that fraud in the south could steal his strong finish in this round. The press, and to some extent the international community, continues to watch out for serious fraud allegations, while the Independent Election Commission (IEC) continues to call for patience and calm. End Summary.

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A Karzai Victory Assured, According to his Supporters  
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¶2. (C) While President Karzai's campaign has also indicated that he will respect the process, he and his supporters have made it clear that they expect the outcome of the election will be determined in the first round. The campaign publicly claimed that it secured between 55 percent and 70 percent of the vote and quickly spread the news that the election outcome would be determined in the first round. According to a prominent businessman and Karzai donor, they reportedly held a private celebration in the palace on August 22. National Security Advisor Rasul told us that they will accept quarantining of fraudulent ballots but reject the idea that this process could have an outcome on the election results. Even with low Pashtun turnout, they believe that they have won the elections through Hazara, Uzbek and some Tajik votes. They remain suspicious that the international community will use the ECC to push the election into a second round.

¶3. (C) For example, MP Fazal Karim Aimaq (Kunduz, Aimaq) told us August 24 he was one of many "reluctant Karzai supporters." He said he had made a political calculation on who would win the election and he had come to the conclusion that Karzai would be re-elected. Aimaq remarked that Herat-based warlord Ismael Khan had made a similar calculation, although in both cases, "their hearts were elsewhere." He explained that other like-minded Tajiks had attempted three strategies before deciding to support Karzai: 1) reform Karzai so he would favor former mujahedeen like himself; 2) form a strong opposition coalition with Ashraf Ghani, Khalilzad, Jalali and Abdullah; and 3) form a coalition that would include the Hazaras, Tajiks and Uzbeks. He lamented that all three strategies had failed, so the only remaining option was to join Karzai and attempt to influence him from within the fold.

¶4. (C) Aimaq was confident that Karzai had won in the first round. Although Aimaq acknowledged that fraud was an issue, he was confident that IEC's findings would not change the outcome -- since Karzai had appointed the the IEC commissioners. He highlighted Karzai's strong numbers in the south, in Dostum's home province of Jowzjan in the north, and in Herat, where Aimaq claimed Karzai had won about 50-percent of the vote, thanks to his alliance with Ismael Khan. Aimaq ventured that if Karzai won less than 51 percent in the first round, say only 45 percent, and Abdullah 25 percent, most

leaders would make a political calculation to back Karzai in the second round. He predicted that if a second round is necessary, Karzai would win by a landslide. The down-side of this scenario would be that Karzai would have to make promises to an even larger number of people with different agendas, making him a weaker leader and even more "beholden to everyone."

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Abdullah: A Warning, but Also A Pledge to Fight Legally  
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¶15. (C) Late August 23, Dr. Abdullah's campaign called to ask for an appointment the next day with Ambassador Eikenberry. At the meeting on August 24, Abdullah raised again his fears of wide-spread ballot-stuffing and voter turnout inflation in the south, as the only fraud that could truly change the outcome. Abdullah's estimates of his returns in the north and west appear to track with those of Karzai's camp, indicating that candidate agents and others are accurately reporting the posted numbers from each polling station to their headquarters. The divergence (Karzai's claims of victory, Abdullah's concern) is in key provinces in the east and south, as had been expected. Abdullah claimed that he had videos of ballot stuffing, and a tape of a police chief in Ghazni admitting his acts of manipulation.

¶16. (C) Abdullah's tone was fairly measured and he again stated that he would do what was right for the country if he lost, and would restrain his followers. However, he reiterated his concern that he could not give up without a fight, on behalf of his followers who had risked much for him

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and who had had their hopes raised. He told the Ambassador that in his view, the success of the United States in Afghanistan rested on our partnership with a government which had true legitimacy; he might lose, he said, but "in two years no one will be the winner" since Karzai's tenure will be tainted and the country would fall into disorder. "In two years, your Congress will be disappointed" and pressure would mount to withdraw our support if nothing changes, he said.

¶17. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry reiterated that we would support the ECC and IEC examination of all poll results. He noted that the international community, and especially the UN SRSG, were following this process closely and were meeting frequently. He said the U.S. first principle was the credibility of the elections, and that we recognized this would be a difficult period ahead. He asked Abdullah if there was the possibility of his entering into a coalition with other candidates; Abdullah said that for now he was keeping his distance from them because they were attacking the legitimacy of the election itself.

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Abdullah Making a Deal?  
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¶18. (C) Although Abdullah has never told us he would consider joining Karzai, these rumors continue and they seem to originate primarily from the Karzai campaign. Abdullah's usual statement to us is that he could have been anything he wanted in the Karzai government, or he could have continued his comfortable life going to international conferences and living in India - but he made his choice to take a "serious" role and oppose Karzai and his cronies. He reiterated to Ambassador Eikenberry his interest in the 2010 Parliamentary elections, although he admitted he had not done much in the past month to organize the "national movement" he envisioned.

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Ghani: National Unity Government  
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¶19. (C) The European Community Delegation and other EU

Presidency representatives report that in a meeting with Ashraf Ghani on August 23, he told them that the country is at a "turning point" and that the decisions made now can determine the fate of the Obama/NATO strategy. He asserted that the elections were illegitimate and to pretend otherwise was to "waste time"; that the only way forward to preserve order would be to create a Government of National Unity, and to avoid a second round of voting; and that violence was a very imminent threat to national order. He claimed that the Ministry of Interior was not fully in control by Minister Atmar and that Kabul was "unprotected"; he further stated that Abdullah may not be able to control his supporters.

¶10. (C) Ghani stated that "all key players" must pay a price to join a national unity government in order to present a legitimate, stable alternative to either a stalemate or violence. For example, Karzai's brother should be exiled from Kandahar; neither major candidates can be allowed to claim victory; all candidates should come together to call for peace; and one major candidate (he suggested himself) should renounce politics and assume the role of mediator. Ghani's next move is unknown; according to Abdullah, Ghani is in Dubai, and Ghani's office confirms he is out of Kabul.

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The Media Fixates on Fraud Allegations. . .  
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¶11. (U) With less than day remaining before the IEC releases 10 percent of the results, media reports have focused on speculation on possible outcomes and allegations that fraud and ballot stuffing marred the August 20 elections. Both Karzai and Abdullah's campaigns continue to publicly note concerns that fraud will impact the results. Other candidates are also alleging fraud; the campaign of Lower House Deputy Speaker Mirwais Yaseni claimed that thousands of votes cast for Yaseni were removed from ballot boxes in Kandahar. The allegations are likely to increase with the IEC's rolling release of information, starting August 25.

¶12. (U) Media reports also feature the plans and opinions of the IEC and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). IEC Chief Electoral officer Dr. Najafi addressed concerns about fraud while on a local talk show, highlighting the safeguards built into the system that will allow investigators to identify areas where fraud likely occurred. The ECC again reported receiving over 225 complaints about violations and vote rigging, 35 of which ECC commissioners have described as &very serious.<sup>8</sup> Local press have

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reported on the ECC's authority to nullify votes from areas determined to have been impacted by fraud and the audits and investigations the ECC is planning before final results can be released by the IEC.

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While the IEC Calls for Calm and Patience  
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¶13. (C) The IEC continues to publicly and privately emphasize the need for calm and patience. Ambassador Carney and PolCouns met August 24 with IEC Chair Ludin and three other commissioners. Ludin appreciated U.S. support for a "patient" approach that will allow the IEC to roll out information as it becomes available and to work with the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). (Comment: While it is true that Karzai appointed the IEC's seven commissioners, including its chairman and deputy, the IEC has broken ranks in the past with Karzai. At the moment, the political classes are choosing either the ECC or IEC as their trusted body. End Comment.) Regarding some candidates', including Abdullah's, concerns that the preliminary results to be announced August 25 could include votes that are currently under review, Ludin -- and perhaps more importantly, his

director for the technical side of the vote tally process --  
assured us that that only votes that pass a certain level of  
certification by the IEC will be announced.

EIKENBERRY